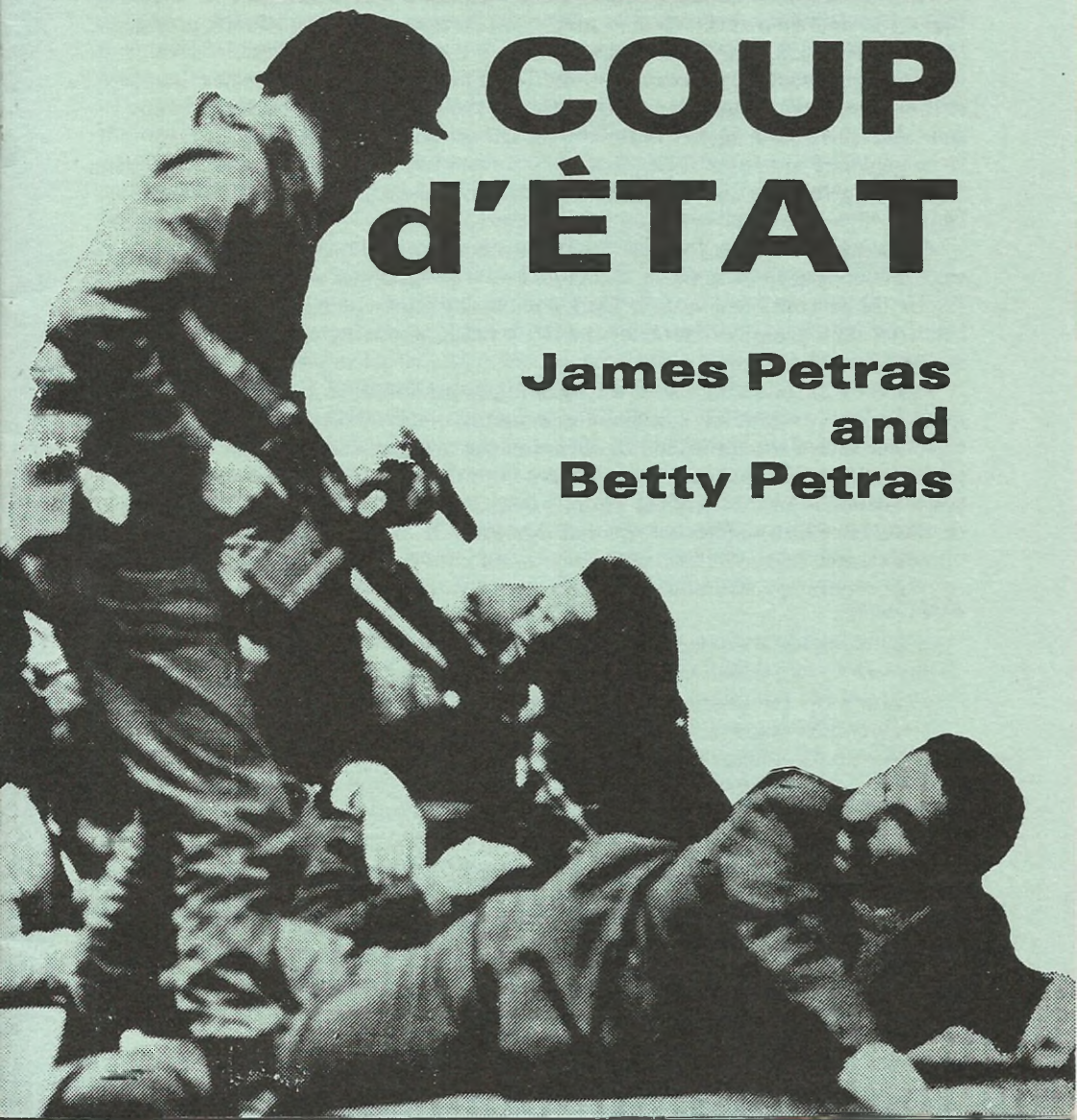


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THE CHILEAN COUP d'ÉTAT

**James Petras
and
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Introduction

The seizure of power by the armed forces of Chile, the murder of President Allende, the butchery of an unknown number of socialist, communists and trade union activists: all these terrible events demand a response from the world socialist movement. This response must inevitably be one of action: but it should also be one of understanding.

Immediately after the Coup d'Etat broke out, and before it had become clear that it had definitely established its rule, albeit temporarily, Edith Russell, acting for the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, sent a telegram to the British TUC urging an immediate trade boycott of the Junta which was usurping power. In answer to this call, the dockers of Hull pressed their organisation, the Transport and General Workers' Union, to initiate the demand for a general world boycott to be organised under the auspices of the International Transport Workers' Federation. Soon after, they declared their own unilateral embargo on Chilean cargoes. Quite clearly, this initiative should be extended.

At the same time, the socialist movement has a manifest duty to examine and explain what happened in Chile, and to elaborate programmes which can both reverse the present trend in Chile itself, and prevent its re-emergence in other countries. This pamphlet by James and Betty Petras is offered as a contribution to this end.

The work of solidarity does not stop at this point, however. Hortensia Allende, the President's widow, has appealed for an international tribunal to expose the repressive acts of the Junta, and to document the intrigues of international companies in Chile. The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation warmly supports this call, and is writing to members of the recently constituted Bertrand Russell Tribunal on torture in Brazil to discover whether they are able to help bring such a body into existence.

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The Chilean Coup d'État

October 1973

In many ways Chile in August 1973 resembled Spain 1936: a popularly elected left socialist government resting on the support of the industrial proletariat and the rural poor; tension and uncertainty rippling through the ranks of the left intelligentsia — waiting, knowing, any day, any moment, to hear the news that the military garrisons had revolted against the regime and that they would have to respond quickly with arms; the desperation, hysteria and frustration of the shopkeepers, businessmen and professionals, who were also waiting for the military to move, who everyday prayed for a *golpe* that would put the workers back in their place, would end “this nightmare” and return Chile to its “rightful owners,” *la gente decente*; and out of the slums, enticed by money from right-wing sources and probably the US embassy, hundreds of lumpen poured into the downtown centre — the fascist street-fighters of *Patria y Libertad* who filled the streets bringing desperately needed food to the workers’ barrios. Would it be today, tomorrow? Who would start it and how would it end? The questions arose, hung in the air, and remained unanswered. Each day in the early morning dawn the militants dragged themselves back to bed after another night of preparedness, another night of “extreme alert” on orders issued from the Central Unica de los Trabajadores (CUT — National Workers’ Union).

On the morning of September 11, the top military chiefs decided to make their move. A junta was formed which demanded that Allende resign his elected post. The Navy commanders who had recently purged scores of constitutionalist sailors mutinied and seized control of the port city. At this signal, Air Force commanders sent planes to strafe and bomb the palace into submission, while Army units captured the communications network, and Allende remained isolated in the governmental palace where he was to be assassinated. Later, thousands of workers were killed.

The military coup was not an isolated act but the culmination of right-wing violence that had raged in recent months. Nor were Allende’s final attempts at compromise the first time he had had made concessions to the military. For months right-wing terrorist groups had been in the streets — assassinating workers and destroying public facilities. Right-wing truck owners had been holding the government hostage while shooting truck drivers trying to make deliveries. The Christian Democratic and National Party politicians joined in passing legislation to illegitimize the elected government. Purges in the ranks of the armed forces and the forcible resignation of loyalist officers prepared the ground for the coup, and Allende accepted it all in the name of compromise, security and reconciliation. He sent his condolence to the widows of the murdered workers, told working-class housewives he sympathized with their problems but lacked the legal instruments to prevent the truck owners from starving the country.

Allende managed in the end to include all the notorious anti-government military chiefs in his Cabinet — in the hope of preventing a coup. Six parties of the government coalition condemned the commanders of the Navy for their hideous tortures of constitutionalist enlisted men; Allende disassociated himself from the denunciation, thereby cutting himself off from the only elements in the armed forces who could have saved the people from a bloody massacre. Allende was attempting to conciliate the very people who were to put the gun to his head in a very few days.

Now Allende is dead, killed in the Presidential Palace where he was placed by millions of Chileans searching for a way out of poverty and exploitation. Allende will always be remembered for the honest effort he made to bring about a more democratic society. His personal bravery and dedication to the cause of social liberation will forever remain a symbol to those Chileans who have emerged to fight against the military dictatorship. For them Allende is not only a symbol of a more just and humane society, but a popular leader of great personal integrity. His final refusal to accede to brute force and his willingness to die rather than surrender will inspire millions of young men and women who carry on the struggle.

How did the military takeover come to pass? During its first year and a half, the Allende Government initiated peaceful but effective change. Large landed estates were expropriated, foreign mines were nationalised, and banks were statified — a measure of social justice long awaited by the Chilean populace. A number of hastily written books and articles were churned out by impressionistic observers hailing “la via Chilena” as a vindication of the electoral path of revolutionary social change. Yet it was too early, the major test was still to come. As the workers and peasants gained in power and authority, demands and pressures increased to extend the process to industry, commerce and services. And it became clear early in 1972 that precisely those amorphous strata described by sociologists as the middle classes would not go along even if a majority of the electorate willed it. “Socialism” was barely tolerable if it affected the foreign and agrarian rich. But as workers began to occupy their factories, and to make efforts to equalise salaries and reduce status differences — as the petit-bourgeoisie saw their illusory hopes of someday becoming captains of industry or commerce smashed by the collective action of workers — they turned with a vengeance against the Government.

It was not any particular decline in income, or loss of material goods, that can adequately explain the intensity of feeling with which these petit-bourgeois sectors threw themselves into action. As a matter of fact it is likely that many of these groups have actually benefited materially from the Government’s redistributive policies. Yet the mystique of property, mobility and ambition was being profoundly violated. As one pro-Christian Democrat professional in Chile told us, “Our way of life is being threatened. What do I care that I am making more money if the rotos are going to have their way.” Another middle-sized factory owner exclaimed that, “We are surrounded. In everything we must deal with, there is the Government! We have no security; we will not invest.” These Chilean enthusiasts of the “democratic marketplace” insisted, “*Nobody* wants him!” ignoring the fact that Allende was democratically elected and was still supported by the working class. Such “democrats” confused their own desire to retain their privileges with those of “every-

body." From those whose security had been most fragile before, one heard a continual refrain which contained both plaintive yearning and prophetic understanding: "Chile will never be the same."

Popular Power

In October 1972, the right-wing launched its first major offensive: doctors abandoned hospitals, shops were closed, truck-owners blocked the highways and mobs of middle-class students tried to take over the downtown area. This effort was thwarted as hundreds of thousands of workers occupied their factories and kept them running, set up distribution networks, and prepared for armed combat. The Right extracted some concessions from the Government, including military appointees to the cabinet; lost several score factories to the workers; and withdrew, hoping to win in the March 1973 elections what they could not accomplish in the streets during the October days. But in the congressional elections, the Left increased its vote substantially over the 1970 presidential elections. Moreover, the bases of support for both Left and Right were much more homogeneous: in the proletarian quarters, the Left rolled up large majorities, while the Right did the same in middle-class areas. The elections settled nothing; they were a prelude to new and more ominous confrontations.

In June 1973, an abortive right-wing military putsch was defeated by loyalist military officers. The CIA surely must have laughed at the rebels' ineptness: their tanks observed the stop signs and red lights on their way to seize the governmental palace; mass communication networks were overlooked; and when a tank commander requested petroleum and was refused by the gas station attendant ("There's a gas shortage, you know.") the putschists abandoned the tank. Nevertheless, 21 people were killed before the rebels were put down, and US military advisers must have resolved to correct their "inadequacies" in the future. The well-coordinated uprising of the Chilean armed forces on September 11 was nothing if not a professional operation.

The petit-bourgeois offensive which sought to paralyse the country provoked a historic counter-offensive among the Chilean working class: *Poder Popular* – Popular Power. The very concept was antagonistic to the bureaucratic control of the Government apparatus. "The people are fighting, creating Popular Power," became the new rallying cry.

Factories, stores, offices and farms were occupied, owners and counter-revolutionary managers were expelled, and the workers themselves assumed the administration and defence of the means of production. As *Alerta!*, a daily wall paper of October 1972, proclaimed, "Chile is to be found producing normally from Arica to Magellanes, in the city, in the mines and in the countryside."

The accounts of the initiative and determination with which the workers responded were varied; when the Revlon textile factory was found closed, the workers, all of them women, met, organised, persuaded their vacillating companeros, and single-handedly set the industry operating again. When public transportation halted, workers trudged miles on foot to assume their posts at work. Even the children of the working-class municipality of San Miguel organised to clean the

streets of the *miguelitos*, the bent nails scattered by rightists to disable the workers' vehicles.

Networks of direct distribution were established: using vehicles requisitioned from the factories, workers brought their products — dishes, shoes, sugar — straight to the neighbourhoods to be sold or exchanged for foodstuffs brought by peasants from the countryside. In the words of a Socialist in Concepcion — both a CUT leader and a leader of an industrial *cordon* — “The potential for Popular Power already exists in the consciousness of the worker, . . . but a large part of converting this into a concrete reality will depend on the vanguards.”

What began as a “defensive measure” soon took on a meaning of its own; new forms of class mobilisation, organisation and struggles emerged. Industrial belts (*cordones industriales*) were organised from below, linking all factories within an area to co-ordinate the workers' resistance to a rightist-military coup. *Comandos comunales* (municipal councils) spontaneously emerged, joining factory workers, neighbourhood assemblies, women's organisations, slum settlers — all the popular forces within a geographical area — and providing a vehicle for direct action. These commandos bypassed the traditional Left leadership and established trade union apparatus, whose capacity for instant mobilisation was found wanting.

In describing the success of the cordones, one leader pointed to the fact that, “communists as well as socialists, MAPU, FTR, PR and independents worked together united in the tasks of the cordon.” The leaders of these proto-soviets were described by one Allendista as “insolent young men” — aggressively independent young militants whose class instincts distrusted the wheeling and dealing going on in the Moneda (the governmental palace). They trusted in their own power, that of their *compañeros* and their workmates. When Allende called on the factory workers to march on the palace to defend the government against the June putsch, some militants are reported to have told Allende to come to the cordones to be defended.

August 1973 — The Prelude

The cordones and commandos reached their peak in the October 1972 crisis and confrontation; and then, lacking resources and practical tasks, they began to ebb, their members attracted back to the CUT, which organised marches to defend the Government. After initially failing to register the significance of the cordones, the CUT moved to link them more directly to their organisation.

The centre of the struggle has been in the urban centres, which contain over 70 per cent of the labour force. The peasants, while not irrelevant, were an important *auxiliary* force in the struggle between workers and bourgeoisie. The peasants provide logistical support — supply foods and raw materials. And now in the civil war, the peasants could provide recruits for the urban armies, or the countryside could become a “fall-back area” if the struggle is prolonged.

By August the economy had begun to deteriorate because of the intense social and political conflict. The shortages of essential food items had begun to adversely affect the standard of living in working-class districts — where government and popular distribution methods failed to function with the efficiency of October 1972. The lack of raw materials had caused important industries to function at less than

full capacity, and construction of desperately needed public housing halted as building supplies ran out. Bread lines in working-class sectors were commonplace, while hoarding, black-marketeering and speculation had become a way of life in the *barrios altos*, the upper-income neighbourhoods. Run-away inflation rates averaging a 15 percent monthly increase during June, July and August were further dislocating and undermining the economy. Inflation, shortages, and their consequences exacerbated the conflict between social classes.

In the struggle for control over increasingly scarce resources in a polarized class situation, each side demanded more radical solutions. The workers in the factories insistently sought rationing, workers' or governmental ownership of transportation and retail distribution, and a *mano dura* (hard hand) against the speculators, profiteers and opponents who were sabotaging the economy. Some *cordones* proposed to seize the trucks of the private owners whose main goal was to bring down the Government; the truck lockout was accompanied by hundreds of rightist anti-government terrorist incidents, particularly by the fascist *Patria y Libertad*. Over 500 such attacks between mid-July and August alone were launched against bridges, railroad tracks, power facilities, oil pipe lines, stores, homes and trucks. Meanwhile, the legal opposition parties blocked all reform legislation, used the courts to free terrorists, dispatched the army to disarm factories, prevented any legislation on sanctions against speculation and blackmarketeering, passed a congressional resolution calling on the government to resign because of incompetence, launched impeachment proceedings against members of the Cabinet, and openly urged the military to take over key posts in the Government. In addition routine sackings of the economy occurred in the private sector (disinvestment and running down of machinery), and bureaucratic sabotage in the public sectors. Later the Christian Democrats endorsed the coup they had prepared.

This internal activity was carefully co-ordinated with US policy designed to further weaken the economy. Loans and credits from public, private and international banks were cut off and shipments of essential parts for US produced machinery were inexplicably "delayed." On the direct action front, US financing of opposition activity – especially the truckowners lockout – was evidenced by the large influx of dollars which stabilized for over a month the price of the dollar on the black market. The US Ambassador, Nathaniel Davis, is a veteran with practical experience in eliminating leftists; during his ambassadorship in Guatemala, several thousand working-class and peasant militants were gunned down. In Chile, out of an embassy staff of 140 officials, Davis surrounded himself with a team of key operatives – "professionals" with long experience in the ways and methods of subversion. Their efforts were cloaked in utmost secrecy; only the results were obvious. Their credentials speak for themselves: John W. Isaminger, political section of the embassy (1942–Army Intelligence; 1951–Intelligence for the Pentagon; operations in La Paz, Guatemala and Washington); Daniel Arzao, Political Council, US Embassy (1943–Army Secret Service; 1951–State Department; 1953–CIA; operations in Phnom Penh, Montevideo, Bogota and Washington); Raymond Warren, office of the First Secretary (1943–US Air Force; 1954–State Department and later CIA; operations in Caracas and Bogota); Frederick Lastrash, First Secretary (1942–US Marines; 1948–Naval Intelligence; 1956–State Department; opera-

tions in Calcutta, New Delhi, Amman, Cairo and Caracas); John Tipton, Second Secretary (CIA and State Department; operations in Mexico City, La Paz and Guatemala).

In great part, the deterioration of the economy was the result of the political opposition both internal and external, and not the incompetence and bungling of socialist ideologues, as reported by the US press. Under the pretext of objective reporting, anti-communist journalists like Jonathan Kandell of the *Times* and Norman Gall white-washed right wing terror, US aggression, and Christian Democratic sabotage, presenting the same picture as the rightist press in Chile: leftists threatening democracy while leading the country to anarchy and chaos. Such reporting created the political atmosphere for the “tragic” but inevitable overthrow of the Government!

A measure of natural dislocation accompanies any transitional period involving fundamental social change: there were administrators directing industries who still lacked the full experience to do so; there was general laxness in disciplining absentee workers; and, as one US technocrat commented, there was an “excess” of democracy in running enterprises. This was in some sense a necessary development. After hundreds of years of exploitation, the workers had a lot to say to each other and a lot to learn — as they were the first to admit. But what was most impressive was the way in which the workers were learning to control their destiny: over one-third of the employees in the metal-machinery sector of industry attended training schools to learn new skills; courses in accounting and budgeting (both prerequisites to efficient management) were overflowing; the national plan, including priorities on allocation of resources, was discussed intelligently and freely at workers’ assemblies in the plants. The short-term costs of this “excess” democracy were perhaps more visible, but less relevant, than the long-term gain: in this direction, it seemed, lay socialism with a human face. And it was the workers we spoke to who were most aware of their own shortcomings, as well as those of the Government.

Obviously, the economy could not continue performing for long in this way. Yet the deterioration of the economy could not have been resolved in the manner proposed by the Communist Party of Allende. No efforts at increased productivity and planning had a chance to succeed while the question of political power remained undecided. Increasing productivity or controlling inflation would not have occurred as long as the material means to realise these goals were controlled in part by an opposition whose singular goal was the destruction of the Government. For example, this winter (June to August), the Communist Party made a gigantic effort to increase the areas of land to be sown and succeeded — until the truck-owners’ strike paralyzed the delivery of fertilizers and seeds, as well as leaving peasants with no means to deliver their products to the city. But Allende’s complaint that he lacked the “constitutional” means to prevent the destruction of society was no encouragement to the Left least of all to working-class women who stood three and four hours in line for oil and bread, when it was available. No wonder when thousands of militant proletarian women sought an audience at the Moneda, they demanded the Government confiscate the trucks removed from use by their owners — who had refused all settlement offers, except, as one typical owner put it, “one based on the departure of this Government.”

A Nation Divided

By September there was a great and widening division in Chile — a polarization of class forces in which everyone was almost obliged to take sides. Not everybody on either side was clearly aware of the refinements of underlying ideologies, or all of the consequences inherent in the political position with which they were allied. In part, the lines were drawn according to class loyalties and sentiments — a mixture of social solidarity and antagonism to those who threatened to impose an alien way of life.

For a moment the working class' newly-won role as protagonist of a new society engendered a rejection of all forms of domination and exploitation. Freedom and respect were won in massive confrontations and through years of struggle and study; it is inconceivable that the workers will passively return to the old patterns of subservience and domination. They have experienced freedom and they will return to capitalism only at the end of a bayonet. The industrial proletariat formed the core of socialist politics, but it was not alone. Several hundred thousand unionized peasants and rural workers allied themselves with the Left and provided active support, though their capacity for political mobilization was somewhat more limited. Lastly, there were the *pobladores*, the slum settlers, the urban poor — a large and heterogeneous stratum which was badly mauled by inflation and shortages. Despite the bitterness of empty promises and government vacillation, they were loyal to the revolutionary Left, awaiting the promises of the future. Recently in Santiago, the slum dwellers marched with their own leaders, excluding the banners of all leftist parties. Their speakers addressed themselves to their desperate circumstances, insisting that the Government fulfil its obligations to them, but at the same time declaring their willingness to fight for the Government in return.

On the other side of the barricades stand the upper classes and their numerous allies among the petit-bourgeoisie and lumpen proletariat. Among these amorphous social forces, the truck owners showed themselves to be the most combative and effective. Doctors and dentists were on strike almost continually throughout the year. Nearly all the established "professional" associations had become full-time political vehicles for right-wing politics; lawyers, doctors, dentists and agronomists passed a series of political resolutions up to and including the call for the resignation of the Government. In a state of hysteria and impotence, the doctors expelled Allende from the medical association. In the hospitals of the poor, emergency wards were unattended; women in childbirth, children and old people suffered without medical care; but for the doctors, the defence of their class privilege had priority. All the clap-trap about professional ethics evaporated; what remained was the insolent and gratuitous sneer: "Let the workers go to their Socialist ministers for a cure." Probably the most dangerous classes in Chile were the dispossessed, but physically present and politically active, ex-landowners, ex-industrialists, ex-lawyers for US corporations, etc. — all of whom feel they have nothing to lose and are willing to risk anything, to support any adventure, to recover their property. This stratum provided recruits for the fascist terrorist groups and were probably the warmest advocates of "Plan Jakarta" — physical annihilation of several thousand militants put in practice after the coup.

The depth and pervasiveness of class polarization divided the Church and, to a lesser extent, the Army. There were no "purely" professional or non-political organisations in Chile. In the Church hierarchy there were approximately one hundred supporters of "Christians for Socialism" while on the other side, rightist priests were led by one Raul Hasbun, who directs ultra right-wing propaganda over the Catholic University television station. In the middle stands the Cardinal, attempting the impossible — to mediate and reconcile the conflicting forces. In a July exhortation to all Catholics, the Episcopal Council pleaded with both sides to avoid civil war, transform Chile into a modern and progressive society with justice for the poor through profound social change — all through dialogue and prayer.

In the Armed Forces, horizontal divisions replaced vertical ones as class divisions in society became more salient. These divisions were blunted, however, by the capacity of the Government to offer support and encouragement to the enlisted men who remained loyal. The great majority of Navy and Air Force officers supported the coup against the Government. Largely drawn from the urban middle class, many were willing to tolerate nationalist and agrarian changes but shifted to the right along with their civilian counterparts as the process deepened. Prior to the coup, many officers met frequently with US military advisers in Chile, openly expressing their hostility to the Government and expressing their desire for its demise. Not surprisingly, under the cover of these private house gatherings, US military officials encouraged their Chilean counterparts to act. No doubt the State Department's reported promise to a former official of the Frei Government of hundreds of millions of dollars of direct aid to a Frei-led Government subsequent to a coup, served to convince recalcitrant Air Force officers of the "inefficiency" of socialism.

Many enlisted men, sons of the popular classes, were against the coup — because of the improvements that accrued to their class of origin as well as the numerous benefits which the Allende government bestowed on the military. Yet the Government worked instead with their officers, men of the Right, without making any effort to link the workers with the ordinary soldiers. Indeed, during the early part of 1973, the generals were still divided between loyalists (about 40 percent for Allende) and putschists (about 60 percent) allied with the Right or in opposition to all political parties. By the end of August, however, the putschists clearly gained the upper hand, forcing the resignation of three loyalist (Prats, Pickering and Sepulveda), and thus further homogenizing the leadership of the Army General Staff in preparation for the coup. The coup was delayed mainly because there was considerable uncertainty among the generals about the degree of support for such a move among conscripts and enlisted men.

While the Armed Forces were deeply divided, the prospects for a successful rightist coup were dim. The Right instead relied on terrorism, combined with pressure inside the military, in attempting to force the Government to resign. The greatest fear among prudent putschists was that the loyalist sectors of the Army would have sufficient support to arm the workers and turn the coup into a civil war, one which the Left could very well win. The right-wing military waited until it had purged its internal opposition before initiating action on more favourable terrain: a unified army against partially armed workers.

The class polarization also deeply affected the Chilean intelligentsia, a group which, in previous periods, commonly expressed concern for the poor and protested against injustice. But by the end of the Government's third year, university professors and even the majority of students allied themselves against the egalitarian aspirations of the working class. Three-fifths of the professors, and over half of the students, elected the anti-government rector of the University of Chile. Over 90 percent of the students are from the middle class; they provided the bodies for the downtown demonstrations, as well as joining ultra right-wing groups. As in Cuba in 1960, and Russia in October 1917, the "idealistic" students suddenly discovered the incompatibility of their class aspirations and a popular revolution.

The "progressive" intellectuals — those who voted for the Left in 1970 — were disoriented by the intensity of the struggle, appalled and exhausted by the shortages, and uncertain of the role they should assume. "The workers don't need us, they act for themselves," were the words of a sociologist. Immersed in their own day-to-day personal problems, they have played a marginal role in the workers' struggle. Only a small core of revolutionary intellectuals and a minority of students actively participated in the process through disciplined parties and in the day-to-day preparations to resist the coup — recognising their role as auxiliaries to the workers' organisations.

Shattering the Democratic Myth

When Allende was elected in September 1970, a considerable amount of discussion and debate focused on the possibility of Chile following a distinct path toward the construction of socialism, the image projected was of a peaceful transformation of the old structures, utilizing or modifying the existing legal, administrative, military and political institutions. Chile's parliamentary tradition was cited, along with its supposedly non-political professional army, as providing a basis for such peaceful change.

But Chile's parliamentary system was always profoundly anti-democratic. The elected bodies always clearly represented the interests of the ruling classes, while for decades excluding the majority of the lower class from meaningful political participation. This became even more true after 1970, as the system attempted to block any efforts by the working class and peasants to create democratic institutions that reflected their class interests. Congress and the courts were the staunchest opponents of any changes in which the *cordones* or *comandos* would assume any effective legislative power.

The myth of Chilean democracy was also a crucial assumption of Allende's Popular Unity Government. The strategy behind Allende's leadership was that the transition to socialism would be an incremental process; having acquired "part" of the government, the Left through time would gradually gain the other portion and eventually transform governmental office into social power. Unfortunately the historical experience in Chile showed otherwise; even before the coup the peaceful and legal transition to socialism had been brought to a stop. Every institutional road was blocked by the legal and illegal measures adopted by the opposition. The only radical transformations that occurred in the last year were the re-

sult of the independent activities of the working class outside of the Government, and in a few instances against the explicit directives of the Popular Unity leadership. For example, almost three-fourths of the industrial firms in the private sector were expropriated because of workers' initiatives, enterprises which the Government had no intention of nationalising and which at one point Allende and the Communists tried to return to their previous owners — unsuccessfully, however, because the workers would have none of it.

As a result of the Government's incapacity to meet the obstructionist and illegal challenges of the Right, or the demands of the workers, during the Chilean winter of 1973 governmental authority sharply declined. Right-wing and working-class actions increasingly defined new areas of power. The Christian Democrats, who a year ago pretended to oppose a military takeover, were insisting the Government be replaced by military officers. Senator Frei, the US's man in Santiago, refused to criticize the military putsch of June 29, or the continuing rightist terror, while his party's paper appealed to the most retrograde prejudices of the petit-bourgeoisie; on the editorial page of *La Prensa* appears an article decrying the takeover of Chile by a "Jewish-Communist cell!"

Defying every Government decree, the Christian Democrats and their right-wing allies in the National Party and *Patria y Libertad* was seeking to assemble a parallel government while goading the military to seize power. In anticipation of September 11, a National Party congressman publicly acknowledged shooting at demonstrators outside of Congress, justifying his action as necessary to defend himself against "Communist dogs." The bourgeoisie openly defied all existing laws which did not suit their interest, all in the name of liberty and democracy. The workers, on the other hand, moved ahead and expropriated factories, attempting to organise themselves for defence, rejected judicial decisions handed down by bourgeois jurists. The same jurists who freed right-wing bombers and jailed peasant demonstrators were described in the US press as an independent judiciary.

Within the industrial belts, the workers' defence Committees and distributive networks were singularly hampered by the Government's unwillingness to accept a general rationing scheme administered from below. The Chilean workers were aware of the fact that all the expensive restaurants were full of middle-class patrons stuffing themselves with meat and chicken and pisco sours, while they in turn waited in line in hopes of obtaining a bone for soup. The workers' support of Allende was conditional and critical; but lacking any clear revolutionary alternative, they pushed ahead hoping he would rectify his course before it was too late. Despite misgivings about the Government, workers had no illusions what its overthrow would mean. They had already witnessed the barbarous treatment meted out by rightist military officers supposedly searching for arms caches in the factories.

Time Runs Out

In the day-to-day struggles in the barracks, factories and fields, each side tried to gain tactical victories, accumulating forces which would weaken the other side. Each side attempted to impose its own definitive solution to the question of political hegemony; and in the process each side could have been capable of paralyzing

the economy and society. In the middle stood Allende, desperately trying to finish his term of office, appealing first for negotiations with the enemy, and then turning to the workers to defend him against the violent threats of precisely the same people with whom he had proposed a settlement the day before. The institutional noose fastened around Allende's neck by the combined political-military opposition was tightened every day.

First, a *Ley de control de armas* (arms control law) was passed, purportedly to disarm "all" armed groups. Administered by the Army, it resulted in massive searches and raids of factories; workers were herded out in the most humiliating and insulting fashion. Though arms were seldom found, the generals made their point to the workers about what they could expect after a golpe. These operations with helicopters and blocked roads were clearly preparations, simulations of a real military takeover.

Throughout July and August, Navy commanders harangued enlisted men against the Government, and then proceeded to arrest those individuals who objected for being "insubordinate." Brazilian-style tortures, such as the forced ingestion of human excrement, were applied to enlisted men who had not responded with enthusiasm to the idea of a coup, to force them to admit that they were plotting subversive action. Meanwhile, to facilitate a harmonious takeover, the Navy officers were purging all anti-coup conscripts and enlisted men, as well as leftist factory workers in munition factories.

In the third instance, the right-wing generals exerted sufficient pressure to oust non-socialist but loyalist General Carlos Prats. Allende, faced with the choice of retiring six rightist Generals and perhaps facing an open military confrontation, or accepting the resignation of Prats, chose the latter. By so doing, he surrounded himself with even more conservative forces, and destroyed one of the few chances the Left had of leading a successful military struggle against the Right.

Along with the attacks on the workers, enlisted men, and loyalist generals, fascist groups stepped up their terrorist assaults against the small number of shopkeepers and truck and bus drivers who wanted to go about their business. Workers' leaders such as Oscar Balboa, leader of non-striking truckers, were ruthlessly assassinated, and scores of quietly heroic bus drivers were stoned and shot as they tried to complete their runs. But the Government was unable to offer adequate armed protection, especially with generals sitting in the Cabinet, clandestinely plotting the Government's overthrow. The threads of counter-revolution lead back to the opposition parties, and behind them stand the scores of functionaries of the embassy, the CIA, the Pentagon, and the State Department.

It was not legality, nor Chile's "democratic tradition" nor Allende's adroitness which restrained for a time the civilian and military golpistas from achieving their ends. They were acutely aware of the workers' organisations, their capacity for mobilisations, their willingness to fight; they knew, too, that some workers were armed. They were aware of the divisions in their own ranks; they had heard the enlisted men whisper that, "He is the best President we've ever had . . ." And the military officials must have already calculated the costs of the destructive civil war they knew that a golpe would provoke. In a textile factory a young apprentice, a militant socialist, put it nicely: "The military may take over the govern-

ment, but they can't run the factories — we'd blow them up first." Instead the air force leveled them.

But time ran out. The petit-bourgeois violently resisted the expansion of workers' power, the socialisation of the economy, the proletarianisation of the country. The workers were tired of the black market, the shortages and exorbitant prices, the terrorist attacks. As one worker put it, "We lack bread, oil and revolution. We can do without bread and oil, but not without revolution." For many the uncertainty became unbearable; the time came for a definitive answer, and it came from the right.

What will happen in the coming days and weeks? It is hard to believe that the workers will meekly submit to the dictatorship after having tasted a bit of dignity and freedom. But without massive arming of the working class, which can only come from sectors of the Army defecting to the workers' cause, there will be no civil war, only a massacre in the event of a mass uprising. If the workers are armed, they will fight. If not, the struggle will turn into a massive resistance — strikes, stoppages, and slowdowns in all spheres of production, and emergence of armed groups.

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